



## How-To: Put Pix in Your Auction

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### Chapter 1.

Get the picture into your computer in digital format.

In order to post images on the Web and use them in auctions, you must, of course, get them into your computer in electronic format. This is accomplished by either scanning an existing photo with a scanner, or using a digital camera or video capture to take a picture that will already be in digital format. Flat objects (such) as small paper items can also be captured by laying them on the scanner and scanning them directly.

Let's look at the different options for getting your images into the computer in electronic format. We'll discuss the pros and cons of each method, and what methods are best for different items. We'll also talk about the cost of each method, and give recommendations for what to buy and where, and lots of links to find more information on the Web.

Click on one of the choices below to learn more, or just scroll down as we cover each option in detail.

[Digital Cameras](#)

[Scanners](#)

[Video Capture](#)

[Other Options](#)

#### Digital Cameras:

In the last year, digital cameras have dropped in price, and improved in quality to the point that we would recommend a digital camera as your first choice if you are willing to invest \$200 to \$600. (Don't forget, this will be deductible from your selling profits as a business expense if you use it primarily for online sales -- check with your tax advisor).

If you need pictures of items that are not flat and small (scanner material), and you don't already have a video camera (that you could use with an inexpensive video capture device.) a digital camera will be your best bet. For all around versatility and ease of use, a digital camera is likely to be your best bet even if you already have a video camera.

How much you will need to spend will depend on the items you are photographing. If you are taking closeups of small items such as jewelry, watches or coins, you will need a camera with close-up capability, and these cost more.

Here are the four most important things to evaluate when looking for a digital camera.

1. Resolution: You don't need high resolution for images to be viewed on the Web. The average resolution of a computer screen is about 72 pixels (dots) per inch. A 640 by 480 image would take up an entire average computer screen, so you definitely don't need more resolution than this. You can pay extra to get a camera that will shoot at a higher resolution,



which would be good for printing family snapshots, but if you want a camera for web pictures, all that resolution will just be wasted because you will need to reduce the size of your picture for effective web viewing.

2. **File Type:** Most digital cameras these days store images in industry standard "JPEG" format. This is the best format for web photographs, and can be read by almost all imaging software you are likely to use. Some cameras still use their own "proprietary" format, and we recommend that you stay away from those.
3. **Storage Medium and Transfer to Computer:** Make sure you understand how the camera will connect to your computer. You need to connect the camera to your computer in order to transfer the images. There are several ways to make this connection.
  - Cameras can be connected through either the **serial** or the **parallel** port. A parallel interface transfers several bits of information concurrently. A serial interface sends one bit at a time.
  - You can also connect the camera through a flash or PCMCIA interface. That is the small card that plugs into many computers, mostly laptops. If your computer is a desktop unit, or a laptop more than a few years old, you probably don't have a place to insert the PCMCIA card, so this type of interface is worthless. On the other hand, if your computer does have a place for a PCMCIA card, it can be very convenient.
  - Digital cameras can also be connected via the **SCSI** port. "Small Computer System Interface", pronounced scuzzy, is a hardware interface that allows up to seven or 15 peripheral devices to be connected to a single expansion board. SCSI transfers data at a rate of 5MB per second, SCSI-2 at 10-20MB/second. This will probably require to install a special card in your computer.
  - You can also transfer your digital images without actually connecting to the PC at all. Some digital cameras now come with 3.5-inch 1.44MB **floppy** drives. You download the images to the floppy in the digital camera and then pop the floppy in to your computer to transfer the images. In our opinion, this is the most convenient and least expensive storage device, and this is the kind of camera we use. You don't have to worry about connecting cables, just put a diskette in your a: or b: drive, something you already know how to do. (Just think you can take your cameras to parties and hand people a diskette with their picture on it.) As far as we know, the **Sony Mavicas** are the only ones with this capability at present.
4. **Close up Capability:** If you need to get within less than three feet of the items you are selling to get a good picture, ask about the "minimum focusing distance" of the camera. If the minimum focusing distance is more farther out than what you take the picture at, your picture will be very blurry, since the camera won't focus that close.
5. **Price:** Prices vary widely for cameras. The best thing to do is to determine what capabilities you need then read the reviews we have linked below to get an idea of what you will need to spend. Once you have selected a few cameras, shop several outlets to determine the best price.
6. **Return Privileges:** We list this because some low priced outlets don't have very good return privileges. For example some charge a restocking fee of up to 20% on returns. If the camera you buy doesn't hook up properly, or the pictures aren't good enough, you'll be stuck. On the other hand, if you have tried a friend's camera for example, you can afford to shop for the lowest price, knowing that you won't need to return it.

Here is a grid listing a number of digital cameras with links to reviews and recommendations 

Here is PC Magazine Online's guide to digital cameras .

And here is another guide, How to Buy a Digital Camera  from NetBuyer.

**Where to buy:** You can buy digital cameras at almost any camera store, the big computer stores such as Comp-USA, and many online and mail order sources, including the PC Zone  and PC Connection .

**Video Capture:** If you already have a standard video camera, you can buy devices that will capture a still image off the video. You can capture these images live, or from a tape. The big advantage here is cost, if you already have the video camera, it will only cost you about \$100 for everything you need. The most popular, and we think the best video capture system is a Snappy. Their new version 3.0 includes cables and a device that you connect to your parallel (printer) port and all the software you need. Snappy 3.0 sells for about \$99 which is much lower than older versions. All the major computer stores like those listed above sell the Snappy.


**Scanners:** You can buy a reasonably priced flatbed color scanner for about \$149. As with digital cameras, keep in mind that you don't need high resolution because you'll be displaying your images on low resolution computer monitors. A 300 dpi scanner, which is considered low resolution for a scanner, will be just fine and will be much less expensive than higher resolution models. In fact, you'll still need to either ask the scanner to scan at about 75 dpi, or reduce the size of the photograph after you scanned it to get it to a reasonable size for the web.

A scanner is best if you would really rather take traditional photos, have them printed and then scan them. (But don't forget to take into account the cost of repeated film and developing costs - you might save money now, but a dozen rolls of film later, the digital camera would have paid for itself.) A scanner is also good for small flat items, including magazines, prints, books, and even coins and watches. Yes, you can put these small items right on the scanner glass and scan them as if they were paper.


For our money, we would tend to recommend the Microtek ScanMaker E3 or Microtek ScanMaker V310, both of which retail for about \$149 at the PC Connection or PC Zone.

One thing to be sure to check on is how the scanner will connect to your computer. Some computers require to install an interface card in your computer. Others connect right through your parallel printer port, which will be a *lot* easier to set up. So if you don't consider yourself a computer technician, buy one with parallel port connection.

**Other Options:** If you're not quite ready to make an equipment investment, here are a few other options to consider:

**Seattle Film Works:** This is a service which will develop your film, and for a few extra bucks, put them in digital format, either on floppy or where you can download a file from the Web. They have free, easy to use software that you download and use to look at and save the pictures you have downloaded. They also include a new free roll of film with their prints! Get two free rolls of film by visiting their web site at <http://www.filmworks.com> 

**Kinko's:** Not just for copies anymore, local Kinko's centers all over the country offer

computers by the hour, scanning services, etc. and they are open 24 hours a day. Find a store in your area by visiting their web site at <http://www.kinkos.com> 

Other things to try: If you ask around, you are likely to find a friend or relative that has either a digital camera or scanner. Most offices these days have scanners. Maybe you can use the one at work (on your lunch hour, of course!)

**[Back to Table of Contents](#)**    **[On to Next Step](#)**

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### Chapter 2

#### Image Format, Size and Quality Adjustments

The previous chapter covered all the different ways to get images into your computer, so this chapter assumes that you have the image already in your computer. If you have a digital camera, a Snappy, or a new scanner, you'll need to read the directions and try a few sample images so you have something to work with for this chapter.

Once you have a picture in your computer, you may need to adjust the image format or size to display it on the Web. Different equipment comes with different software, so we can't tell you exactly which buttons to push in your software. We'll give you some the general information that you need to know to make sure your images are ready for the Web.

#### Image formats for the Web:

There are two industry-standard image formats that can be viewed in browsers like Netscape or Microsoft Internet Explorer, gif and jpeg (or jpg). Jpeg is an industry standard that is designed to render photographs accurately, but allow for compression of the image without losing quality. ***If your software has an option to save images to jpeg, (usually with a jpg extension), this is your best choice.*** Gif photographs will not show colors as well, and they are really designed for graphics other than photos.

If you have a digital camera, it is likely that it saves files to jpg format automatically, since the majority do. If using a scanner or video capture, you may have to select "jpg" as an option.

***Troubleshooting tip:*** Just naming a file with ".jpg" on the end doesn't make it a "jpg" file. You need to make sure that you have selected this as the file format in any software you may be using. Look for a "save file as type:" selection box or something similar on the save screen in your software, and make sure that jpg is selected.

#### Sizing your Image for the Web:

One of the commonest mistakes beginners make is to try to use images on the Web that are too large. Images that are too large take so long to download that people quickly get tired of waiting, and go elsewhere. Gigantic pictures are not even that attractive in many cases. You can show just as much detail in a reasonably sized image.

There are two things you must know about your image before you decide if you need

to change anything, the **file size** (how much storage the image file takes up on your hard drive) and the **display size** (height by width).

**Image File Size:** This refers to how many bytes of storage the file takes up. You can view this information in some imaging software, or you may need to look at your folder of images in File Manager (Windows 3.1) or My Computer or Windows Explorer (Windows 95). Depending on your settings you may see file size in k (1000 bytes or characters) or the full file size. In other words, a file taking up 30,000 character of room may show as 30k or 30,000 (30k is actually a little more than 30,000, but this isn't a computer science course, so don't worry about it).

The file size, that is, how much room the file takes up in storage and how long it would take to download over the Web, because of its file size is influenced by two factors, **image display size** and **image compression**:

**Image Display Size:** The height and width of an image is measured in pixels, or dots on the screen. A standard screen on a PC is 640 dots by 480 dots or pixels. The best size for a web merchandise picture is somewhere around 320 x 240, which is about 4" by 3" on an average screen. This will give you good detail, and the user will not need to scroll their window. It will also be relatively small in file storage size.

**Image Compression:** Gif and jpg images are both stored in compressed format. The software removes some extra information that makes the file size smaller without losing image quality unless you go overboard and compress too much. The jpg format is designed specifically to make photographic file sizes smaller without losing quality, which is one of the reasons it is highly recommended as the file format for Web photographs.

Note that compression **does not refer to reducing the size of the image that the viewer sees**, but rather how efficiently it is stored in its file. An efficiently compressed image downloads quickly, but looks as good to the viewer as one a lot larger in file size. Most programs that save in jpeg format have an option that allows you to specify the compression. If your program uses numbers for the jpg compression setting, (Like PhotoImpact) try 80 or so.

If your software doesn't use a number for jpg compression, but rather a quality setting, you'll need a little more trial and error. Try the medium or even low quality settings, and see if there is any loss to image quality, then check the file size.

**Here are some specific image sizing tips for different devices:**

**Sizing images from a Scanner:** Many scanners have a default scan of 300 dots per inch, or even more. Since computers display images at about 75 dots per inch, this will magnify your image to four times its actual size once it is displayed on the screen. Either scan your item at about 75 dpi, or scan it at a higher resolution, and then reduce it. Another way to make any image smaller is to crop it, or eliminate space around the edges. This can be done in nearly any imaging software. Don't forget, a 300 dot (pixel) wide image will take up about half of the viewable web page width, and is plenty wide in most cases. If you set your scanner to 300 dpi, one inch of the object you are scanning will take up about 4 inches on the screen. This will seldom be what you want.

**Sizing images from Snappy:** The default image size from a Snappy is usually set to 640 x 480 display size. This will be way to big, and the viewer will have to scroll the image in the browser window. Set it to save and 320 by 240, and save as a jpg, and you should be fine.

### **Sizing Digital Camera Images:**

**Troubleshooting tip:** We have found that if an image is about 320 x 240, and saved at about a quality setting of 80-85, it will nearly always be well under 30k and a very good quality image.

A really great utility that allows you to compress both gif and jpegs while viewing the compressed images side by side with the uncompressed image is Smart Saver from Ulead Systems. This is great to use if the file is already in gif or jpg format, and you just need to compress it. You can download a free trial by following the links on their home page.. They also make terrific imaging software, Photoimpact, which comes with the Microtek Scanmaker E3, or can be purchased separately.

If you plan the size your scan or video capture, crop as necessary, and then compress the jpeg appropriately, you can easily produce images that are 10k to 30k in size.

### **Image Quality Adjustments:**

If your picture is not quite perfect, the same software that you use to view and adjust size and compression of your pictures will also allow you to make some easy adjustments to the picture quality so it looks better to your viewers. These are totally optional, but sometimes you can really help a picture out with a few minor tweaks. The following are the four most common photo adjustments, and what you can use them for. Remember these are optional, but once you have the basic image capture and sizing down, you might as well look into these for the best images:

**Brightness:** If the picture looks too dark, you can increase brightness. If it looks washed out, you can reduce brightness. Look under "format" or "adjust" menus in your software for a brightness control.

**Contrast:** Somewhat related to brightness, contrast is how much difference there is in the light and dark areas of your picture. If your overall picture seems muddy or very light areas are coming out gray, try increasing both the brightness and contrast for a better looking image.

**Color balance:** Sometimes, depending on your lighting, and your input device, pictures might be a little too red (or green or blue). You can find these options under the adjust image or format menus in your software. You can also set these options in your scanner capture program, or in the Snappy capture program before the image is even captured.

**Sharpness:** If your picture is totally out of focus, or you moved in closer

than the minimum focusing distance of your camera, nothing will make your picture tack-sharp. But using the sharpen setting in your software will make a slightly soft picture a lot sharper. Look under special effects or adjust image in your software. When you find sharpen, try it out at a low setting, and see how it improves the picture. You can sharpen more than once to sharpen it a little more.

Once you've adjusted your pictures if necessary, you're ready to put them on the Web as the next step in getting them into an auction.

**[Back to Table of Contents](#)**    **[On to Next Step](#)**

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